Authority of India has been set up w.e.f. 20.2.1997.

(b) The main objectives of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India is to provide a level playing field for fair competition and engender further confidence in investors, both Indian and foreign, for healthy growth of Telecom Sector in the country.

The Authority has been entrusted with, inter-alia, the following powers;

(i) to seek information on various aspects of service providers' activities;

(ii) to investigate, any matter, in-relation to affairs of any service provider;

(iii) to inspect books and records of service provider;

(iv) to make regulations, consistent with the Ordinance and rules made thereunder to carryout the purposes of the Ordinance.

The Authority may levy fees and other charges at such rates and in respect of such services as may be determined by regulation.

(v) The Authority while discharging its functions may issue direction from time to time to the service providers, as it may consider necessary.

(c) and (d) The Authority will start functioning in the month of March, 1997 and the Central Government have already notified the appointments for the posts of Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and a Member on 20.2.1997.

Directions to Mining Sector

2190. SHRI NAND KUMAR SAI:
KUMARI UMABHARATI:
SHRI SATYA DEO SINGH:

Will the Minister of MINES be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government have issued new directions to mining Sector:

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the time by which the new directions are likely to come into force; and

(d) the extent to which the foreign Investment is likely to be enhanced as a result thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINISTER OF MINES (SHRI BIRENDRA PRASAD BAISHYA): (a) to (d) The Central Government in October, 1996 have issued guidelines for grant of large areas for Prospecting Licences. As per these guidelines, an applicant can be granted upto a maximum of 10,000 Sq. Kms. for the whole country for the purposes of aerial Prospecting. The applications of the said grant have to be submitted to the State Governments only. The Central Government would consider the request after the State Governments recommend the applications to the Central Government. The guidelines have inbuilt scheme of steep relinquishment so that the area left with an applicant for detailed Prospecting at the end of three years is only 25 Sq.kms., specific expenditure commitments on the part of the applicant and aerial prospecting.

With a view to facilitate foreign direct investment in the mineral sector the Government has recently allowed (in January '97) automatic route for foreign equity participation upto 50% in case of mining of iron ore, manganese ore, chromite, bauxite, copper lead and zinc ores besides mining of certain non-metallic minerals. Further, the Government has also allowed automatic approval route for foreign equity participation upto 74% for services incidental to mining viz. drilling, shaft sinking, reclamation of mines, surveys/mapping excluding services related to gold, silver and precious/semi-precious stones. Higher equity participation can be considered on case to case basis through the FIPB route as per the policy prescription under New Mineral Policy, 1993. The above decisions of the Government are likely to accelerate foreign direct investments in the mineral sector.

Ministers Entitlement of Special Train

2191. SHRI MANIKRAO HODLYA GAVIT:
SHRI PARASRAM BHARDWAJ:
SHRI CHHITUBHAI GAMIT:

Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Minister of Railways is entitled to avail of the facility of special train in case he reaches the station late when going to his home town or on private tour; and

(b) if so, the details regarding the rules and regulations meant for the Railway Ministers (Cabinet as well as State Ministers) alongwith the procedure followed in this regard while the Minister of Railways is on official tour or private tour?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI SATPAL MAHARAJ): (a) and (b) As per extant rules, Cabinet Minister or Minister of State, while travelling, only on duty, by rail, may requisition a saloon/ Inspection Carriage to be attached to a regular train. In cases where it cannot be attached to Mail/Express trains and it is impossible for the Minister to travel by other trains, he may order a Special train at the expense of the Government.

Casul Labourers

2192. SHRI DWARAKA NATH DAS: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to refer to the reply given to Unstarred Question No. 3152 dated August 27, 1996 and state:

(a) whether the Government are aware that a good number of casual labourers had been decasualised in North-east-Frontier Railway, but till date nothing has been done for their re-employment though assured by the Government from time to time.